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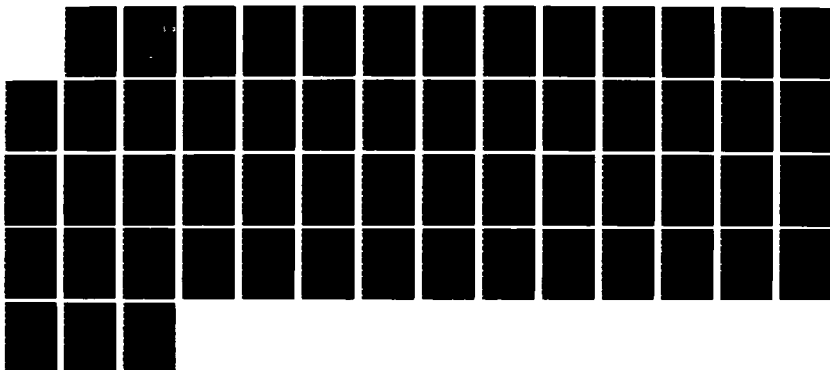
A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE COMPETITION SYSTEM AT THE  
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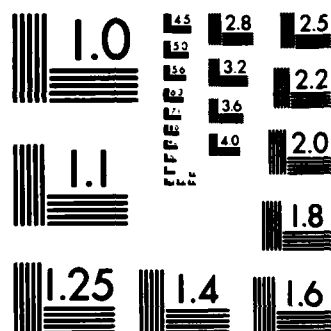
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**A CRITICAL EVALUATION  
OF THE COMPETITION SYSTEM AT  
THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY  
IN 1980**

**BY  
LT COL FRANK R. WOOD  
AND  
COL JOHN P. FLANNERY**

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**FEBRUARY 1986**

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**DEAN OF THE FACULTY  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY  
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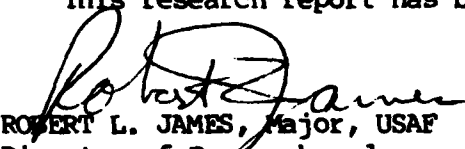
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This research report is presented as a competent treatment of the subject, worthy of publication. The United States Air Force vouches for the quality of the research, without necessarily endorsing the opinions and conclusions of the author.

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This research report has been reviewed and is approved for publication.

  
ROBERT L. JAMES, Major, USAF  
Director of Research and  
Computer-based Education

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**A Critical Evaluation of the Competition System  
at the United States Air Force Academy in 1980.**

**FRANK R. WOOD, Lt Col, USAF  
and  
JOHN P. FLANNERY, Col, USAF**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings of a committee formed by the USAF Academy Commandant of Cadets to study competition at the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1980. The committee was composed of nine officers representing the Academy's major mission elements - military, academic, and athletic. The charter of the committee was open ended; their scope was not limited.

This report first examines competition in terms of its definition, forms, expectations, factors affecting competitive situations, and the theoretical risks of payoffs of competitive activities.

Next, all of the activities at the Academy that make up the competitive environment are catalogued as comprehensively as possible by describing the awards and recognition cadets could earn in each mission element during the study period. For example, The Summary of Competitive Activities lists approximately 130 "contests" which focus on individual achievement and 15 activities which are group or team oriented.

The climate of competition which existed at the Air Force Academy at that time is explored through interviews conducted with cadets. Six groups of 12 cadets from three squadrons were interviewed. Their insightful comments provide a clear picture of what it was like to live and work in a competitive environment.

The report also provides an analysis of the existing competitive environment of the Air Force Academy in terms of expected outcomes and stated institutional goals.

Finally, conclusions and recommendations are offered for policy implementation and future studies.



## PREFACE

Competition at the USAF Academy is a pervasive aspect of each mission element; military, academic, and athletic. Under the assumption that competition, rewards, and recognition are healthy stimuli to learning and individual development, competitive activities have evolved to the point where they dominate the cadets' daily lives. Cadets are constantly engaged in many forms of competition as individuals and as members of various groups. This competitive environment is a perennial topic of discussion among cadets, faculty, staff, and visiting review groups.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings of a 1980 study group formed by the Commandant of Cadets to examine the competition existing at the Air Force Academy at that time. It is the hope of the authors that this report will serve as a significant benchmark for all future studies of this competitive system.

While the authors were the primary contributors to the original study and are solely responsible for the contents of this report, other members of the Competition Study Committee should be recognized for their contributions. Each brought to the study group a wide range of perspectives, experience from all the Academy mission elements, and extensive knowledge from a broad range of military, as well as academic, backgrounds.

### 1980 Competition Study Committee

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Chief, Cadet Wing Standardization  
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## SECTION I

### INTRODUCTION

1. Competition has been an integral part of the American way of life since the beginnings of this nation. Democracy and capitalism create an environment in which successful competitors flourish. This competitive environment intensifies in military service, since war, or the preparation for war, represents competition in its highest form. In preparing our military leaders, it is essential to expose them from the start to the experiences of winning and consequences of losing. At the same time, it is necessary to understand the various types of competition and be aware of the attendant potential risks and payoffs.

2. The mission of the USAF Academy is, in part, to provide cadets with the "character essential to leadership" that will make them effective Air Force officers. A healthy competitive spirit is assumed to be a key factor in any leader's character. Beyond this, a system of rewards and recognition may be useful to inspire a higher level of achievement by individuals and by groups. This system should be supportive of the goals of the institution as well.

3. With these factors in mind, the Competition Study Committee, therefore, did not take as one of its tasks to question the presence of a highly competitive environment at the Air Force Academy. Rather, competition was first looked at in terms of its definitions, forms, and expectations. The theory, presented in Section II, is fundamental to understanding potential payoffs and risks of competitive activities. Next, the committee identified as comprehensively as possible, all the awards and recognition for individuals and groups that presently exist at the Academy. This is done in Section III with the premise that awards and recognition are ostensibly the reward for competitive achievement. Section IV presents a description of the competitive climate at the Air Force Academy from the cadets' perspective. This data was derived through interviews with selected groups of cadets. Finally, the committee compared the cadet perspectives and the various elements of existing competition at the Academy with the theoretical expectations. This analysis is presented in Section V. The conclusions (Section VI) and recommendations (Section VII) stem from that analysis and the hours of spirited committee discussions.

4. As a result of participating in this study, each of the committee members realized a much greater appreciation for the positive payoffs of competition properly used. They also gained a better understanding of the risks or potentially negative effects that can result from competitive activities. These latter aspects of competition are frequently overlooked by traditional "winners" and "high achievers", (terms that generally characterize the Academy faculty, staff, and leaders). As a matter of fact, several of the committee members who were extremely pro-competition "any place and any time", became the most critically objective during the analysis phase of this study. While some of the data offered in this report may appear to be negative or anti-competition, the reader must be assured that the committee made every effort to maintain an objective and balanced perspective. In this spirit, the recommendations of the committee are aimed toward enhancing competition at the Air Force Academy in a systematic way while minimizing the risks and negative effects.

## SECTION II

### BACKGROUND

1. Introduction. To establish a framework for this study, the committee first sought to define competition in its various forms. Research was done to determine expectations of competition and to identify some of the factors affecting the competitive situation. As with any deliberate activity, competition carries some risks along with potential pay-offs. These aspects were briefly explored. Finally, to put competition into a context consistent with the Air Force Academy mission, competition was briefly examined from a military history point of view.

### 2. Definitions.

a. Competition is defined as "the act or process of competing: rivalry: a contest between rivals." Competing is defined as "to strive consciously or unconsciously for an objective (such as position, profit, or a prize)." Rival is defined as "one of two or more striving to reach or obtain something that only one can possess: one who tries to excel." (1) If these definitions are combined, competition becomes "persons or groups engaged in contests striving to excel or striving for an objective which only one person or group may reach". A situation is competitive when the outcomes are distributed unequally, i.e., when the gain of one interferes with the gain of others. A situation in which the gain of an individual group member contributes to the gain of all group members is cooperative, i.e., the rewards are shared.

b. Generally, competition exists in four forms:

(1) Against a Standard - where the individuals or groups must exceed a set standard to gain a reward.

(2) Against Self - where individuals or groups must improve on their own past performance to gain a reward.

(3) Intragroup - where individuals who are members of the same group compete against each other to gain a reward.

(4) Intergroup - where a group as a unit competes against another group to gain a reward.

### 3. Expectations of Competition.

a. Few, if any, situations may be classified as purely competitive or cooperative. In reality, complex competitive/cooperative situations generate individual and group motive hierarchies. For example, when groups are competing, the relative importance of individual motives within the group appears to be subordinated. Thus, within a competing group, individual cooperation rather than competition is more important. (2) When groups are cooperating, individual motives predominate and intragroup competition may emerge.

b. Competition has been frequently conceptualized (by researchers and laymen alike) as a performance motivation that spurs greater effort. It has been shown that competing with others and competing with oneself produces greater quantity of work than does not competing at all. However, there is little difference in quantity between with-others and with-self competition. In terms of quality, with-others competition produces greater errors.(3)

c. Traditionally, expectations of competition are positive. It provides a challenge, inspires greater performance, increases productivity (at least in terms of quantity), enhances cooperation and group cohesiveness and instills a stronger sense of group identity. Certainly, those who advocate competitive activities anticipate beneficial results. However, some disagree with touted benefits of competition and in fact argue that cooperation is a more powerful force.

d. The claim that we live in a competitive society and must therefore learn to cope in that environment is refuted by the suggestion that ours is the most cooperative and interdependent society the world has ever known. The argument goes that while it is true that we occasionally compete with others, competition is the exception rather than the rule of life. We may live for days without competing with others but we cooperate from morning to night.(4)

e. Competition being a powerful motivating force is described as a myth by one author. He claims that competition is of limited value as a means of motivation since it motivates few - only those who feel they have a chance of winning. Although competition is intended to challenge people to greater achievement, it may actually be severely threatening to many. Forcing people to compete when they feel certain the outcome will be defeat can only cause discouragement or rebellion. People do not gain confidence and a sense of self-worth through repeated failures. That author claims that only those who have been fairly successful, value competition so highly. (4)

f. A final point of view of the expectations of competition suggests that competition and cooperation should be used optimally based on the situation. The two ends of the situation spectrum are described as challenge and threat. (5) Where competition creates a challenge and provides stimulation, expectations would be positive. As the situation becomes more threatening, those positive expectations are diminished. Those who advocate competition view it as a challenge; those who oppose competition view it as a threat. In either case, there are several factors which contribute to the outcome of competitive situations.

#### 4. Factors Affecting the Competitive Situation.

a. Any competitive situation is characterized by four basic factors: the task, the reward system, the competitors (individually), and the conflict environment. The combinations of these factors will impact individual motives, group efficiency, and ultimately, the constructive or destructive effect of the competition itself.

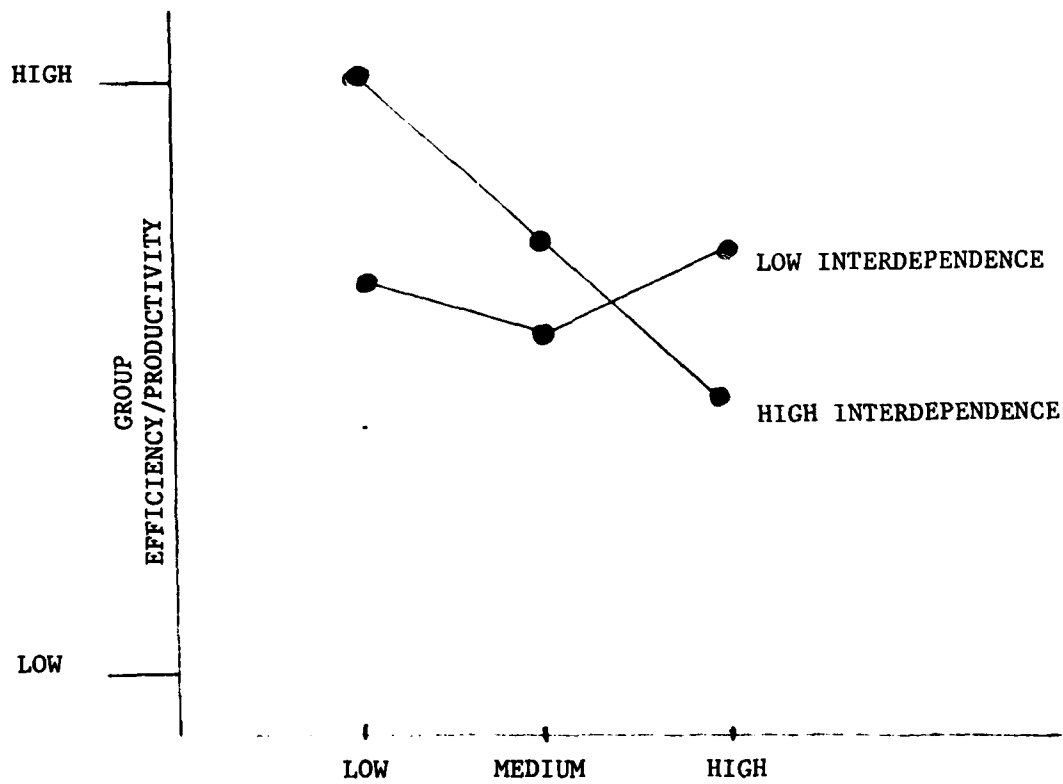
b. Classic psychological experiments conducted with young people going to camp have shown that by structuring the interaction situation (the task) cohesion or conflict could be created among the subjects. When cooperative activities were used (tasks requiring the resources of the entire group), strong in-group identity was generated. Using competitive activities (frustrating win-lose tasks) strong in-group/out-group identities, negative out-group stereotypes, conflict, and aggression were generated. In general, this research suggests that high task interdependence enhances within-group cooperation, and intergroup competition generates intergroup conflict.(6)

c. The effects of competition are related, both to the interdependency of the tasks and to the reward structure.

(1) An interdependent task is one which requires a certain degree of cooperation to complete, while an independent task may be completed with little or no cooperation. For example, an athletic contest between teams is a dependent task. Each player is dependent on other team members to achieve the goal of winning. An independent task, on the other hand, might be an academic course in which individual achievement is not related to overall success of the class.

(2) The reward structure can be typified as equity or equality. Equity systems require rewards to be distributed differentially according to effort, while equality systems tend toward mutually rewarding outcomes. For example, grading on a "curve" illustrates an equity system where those who performed best receive the highest grade. Ordinal ranking based upon competitive performance is also an equity reward system. An equality system would be "contract grading" or grading against a standard where grades are awarded based upon individual performance irrespective of performance of others in the group.

d. Task requirements and reward structure interact in interesting ways to affect group and individual performance. In situations where the tasks are independent, reward structures have less of an impact on performance. However, when tasks require interdependence, reward structures can enhance or suppress performance. The effects of task requirements and reward structures on overall productivity are summarized in Figure 1. This relationship is again altered when "coacting" groups are involved. When two groups are dependently related and rewards are unequally distributed, members of each group must maximize the gain of their group relative to the other group. The consequence is a complex behavior which is partially cooperative and partially competitive; that is, the individuals must cooperate with their own group to out-perform the other group and establish the group's position. Then, they must compete with members of their group in order to establish their own position within the group and maximize personal rewards.(8) Competition and cooperation, then, are a function of the reward structure and dependency relationships between coacting groups. When groups are dependently related, the magnitude of the inverse relationship between differential reward and group efficiency decreases. This is shown graphically in Figure 2. (The importance of reward structures is illustrated by the slope of the lines, and the difference in overall efficiency is probably due to the group process.)



Differential Rewarding of Individuals

Figure 1. Mean productivity scores by differential rewarding in high and low interdependence conditions.

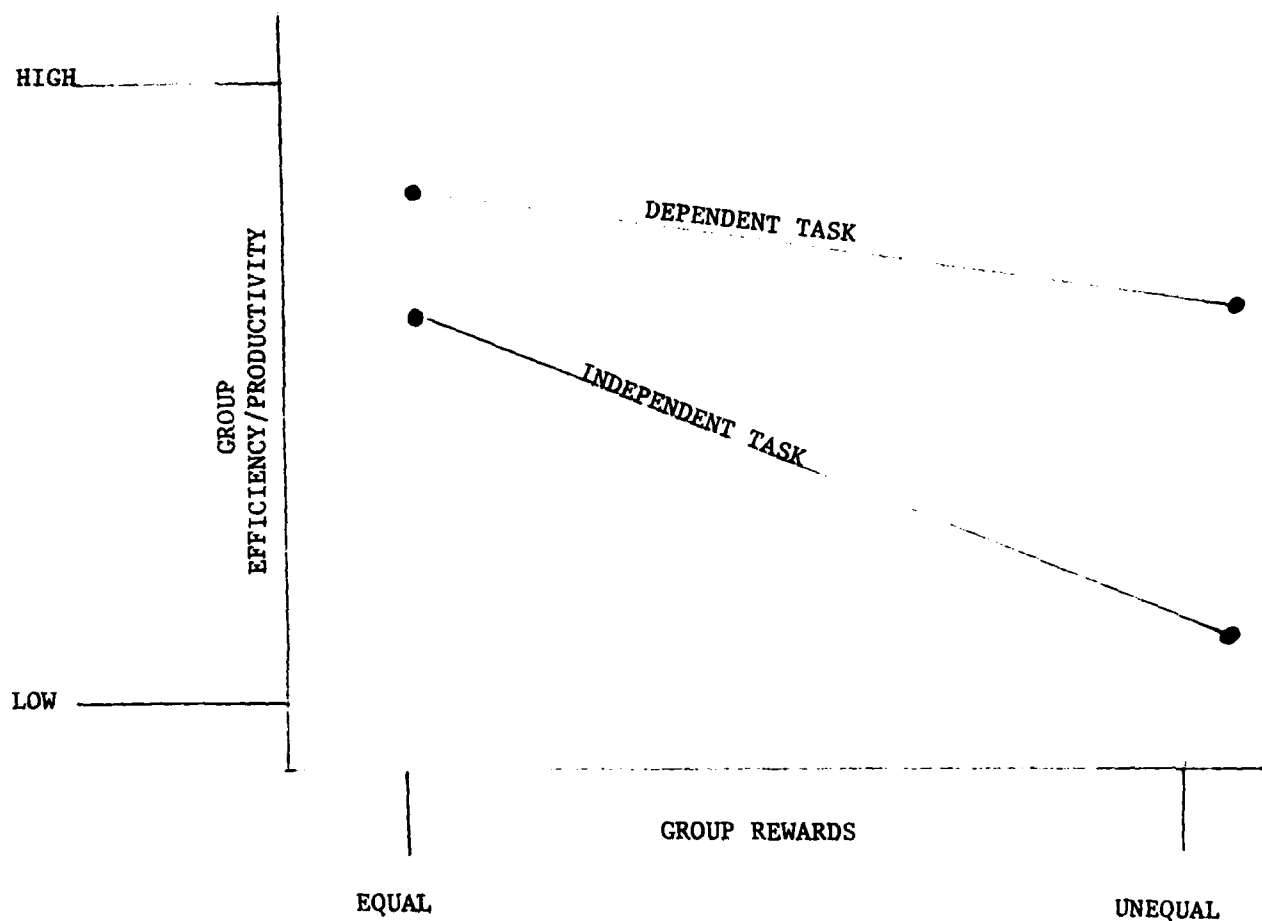


Figure 2. The relationship of group efficiency and productivity task dependency and reward system.

In other words, group efficiency is greatest when the group is engaged in a dependent task and the reward is equal. Group efficiency decreases when the task is independent or as the reward becomes more differentiated. However, differential reward has less of an effect on group efficiency when the task is dependent.

e. Task interdependence, differential rewarding, and productivity have an interesting relationship from the individual competitor's point of view as well. Research indicates that under a differential reward system, an individual may improve his relative position by blocking the productivity of other group members. Under low task interdependence, the strategy of manipulating an exchange to one's own advantage is obviated. With no exchange between group members, the individual's only option is to increase rewards by increasing productivity. Productivity in this case is not significantly affected by conditions of equal or differential reward systems. The condition of high task interdependence yields a different trend and favors both blocking and producing strategies. As rewarding becomes more differentiated, the individual's interest in blocking strategies increases simultaneously and interest in producing decreases. This reaction of individuals is a reason that declining productivity is the cost of situations involving differential rewarding and task independence.(7)

f. Individual attitudes are a key factor in the competitive situation. The notion of justice as equity is basic to Weber's concept of the Protestant Ethic ("He who will not work, neither shall he eat"). Research shows that the difference in the individual's endorsement of the Protestant Ethic (PE) and the fairness of the procedure used to determine the outcome of competition, affected the division of rewards in the social exchange. When the competition is perceived as fair, high PE people favor the equity norm and distribute rewards according to effort. Low PE people favor the equality norm. However, if the competition is perceived as unfair, high PE people overcompensate the loser to offset the social reward of winning incorrectly allocated to the winner.(9)

g. The fourth factor influencing the competitive situation is the conflict environment. This environment runs a continuum from unstructured to highly structured.(10)

(1) Unstructured conflicts are characterized by the absence of social constraints such as norms and roles. Each person may act in ways that reflect his personal beliefs and needs. In this environment, behavior may escalate to a point where the parties appear unconcerned about the cost even to themselves.

(2) In partially structured conflicts, some rules exist regarding behavior but these rules leave the individual with some behavioral freedom. Hence, individuals are encouraged to behave strategically within the framework of these rules. In fact, parties in this environment perceive their interests are best served by adhering to the rules.



(3) Highly structured conflicts may not appear to be conflicts because the rights, roles, and obligations of parties are so specified as to preclude the expression of personal feelings or hostility. A good example is the traffic light which is a highly structured conflict over the right of way.

(4) In general, conflicts in which groups agree on rules and values (partially structured) tend to promote cohesiveness; whereas, conflicts over values and rules (unstructured) decrease cohesiveness.

#### 5. Risk versus Payoff.

a. Earlier in this section, under the discussion of competition expectations, some of the potential payoffs of competitive activity were identified: sense of challenge, higher level of achievement, group cohesiveness, increased productivity, enhanced esprit, etc.

b. There are risks to engaging in competition as well, not the least of which is failure.

(1) Fear of failure or worse, repetitive failures in a competitive environment, can be a destructive consequence. This experience may produce apathy at best and a strong sense of inadequacy, lack of self worth, or hostility, in the extreme. People do not learn confidence by repeated experience of failure.

(2) Another risk associated with competition is spawned by the need to win. Although this is a laudable aim, particularly if the spin-off advantages are achieved, the risk is that winning itself may become the object. If the idea of winning at any cost prevails, the real object of the competition is lost. In this sense, the price of winning may be higher than necessary in terms of human values, broken spirits and disillusionment of those who do not appear in the winner's circle. "In the headlong rush to win, competition too easily loses sight of responsibility. It values aggression, hostility, and scorn. 'Dog eat dog' becomes its philosophy. Too often the degree of glory involved for the victor is only in direct proportion to the abasement and degradation of the loser." (5)

(3) Competition may also create an attitude of distrust, particularly when winning can only be at the cost of the losers (i.e., if my competitors know what I know, it may be used against me and I'll end up the loser). This attitude of distrust can also arise if the competitors do not know the rules or suspect manipulation of the results by those in charge.

(4) Research has proven that a competitive situation can breed aggression. Seeking to create a competitive situation in which, in addition to doing one's best, aggressive behavior would have an instrumental value in winning, researchers found the more competitive the situation (higher rewards for success or greater risks for failure), the more aggressively the subjects behaved. Frequently, the competitive situation aroused feelings of rivalry that went beyond merely winning the competition and involved going out of one's way to hurt the other competitors. This behavior included verbal aggression, interference, or overt physical attacks. In other words, effort was diverted from constructive actions to aggression and even selfdefeating actions. Further, regardless of whether the subjects were previously rated as high or low on aggressiveness, they responded indentially to the competition and reward variables. Situational variables were stronger than dispositional or personality variables.(11)

(5) Another research project showed that those who have the opportunity to engage in rewarding interactions, that is, able to win rewards, have increased self-esteem. Those who are achievers and excel or those who have equal rewards in non-competitive activity enjoy enhanced self-esteem. Anxiety, however, increases for both winning groups when they are faced with a change of situation in which the loss of winning status is possible.(12) Therein lies a potential risk. If these results were turned around, most probably, the researchers would have discovered that the losers, or those not rewarded, would suffer from a decreased sense of self-esteem.

6. Competition as a Function of Military Leadership. The military has long subscribed to the notion that war represents competition in its highest form and tends to associate military leadership with a keen sense of competitiveness. This perspective is correct when viewed on the national level as a "winner take all" situation. This perspective, however, neglects the tremendous cooperative efforts that must occur within the nation-states who constitute the "teams" waging war. There is a structure of task interdependence and a system of group reward. Essentially, for the military organization war is a cooperative effort in which each must do his part. Viewing combat as competitive and selecting competitive persons for leadership positions is problematic and sometimes dysfunctional (consider historical examples of interservice rivalry, lack of cooperation among allies, general officers who question policies of civilian leaders, etc.). The risk in linking competitiveness to military leadership is that it may reduce the overall operational efficiency of the military.

### SECTION III

#### DESCRIPTION OF COMPETITIVE ACTIVITIES AT THE USAF ACADEMY

1. Introduction Competition at the Air Force Academy begins during the selection process, even prior to the cadets' arrival and continues throughout the four years until graduation. All three mission elements - military, academic, and athletic - are highly competitive environments. In this section, the specific competitive activities of each mission element, the criteria of success, and the rewards for achievement will be described.

2. Military Competition. Competition within the military mission element exists between groups, among squadrons, within squadrons, and as individuals.

a. The competition between cadet groups is probably the least significant. This competition exists primarily at the cadet staff level and is transmitted as a motivational factor down to the squadron. One form of competition between groups is performance at Wing Parades during which groups are rank-ordered relative to each other. This evaluation is largely subjective and results are compiled by cadet graders who use a "points-off" system for such criteria as dress, cover, eyes right, arm swing, etc. The competitive environment in this case can be described as partially structured in that specific items are graded but evaluation is subjective. Because of the subjective nature of the grading questions regarding grading criteria inevitably arise among both cadets and officers. Groups competition also exists in the form of Outstanding Group for the Year. The criteria for this award is based on aggregate squadron performance in academics, athletics, as well as military activities.

b. Military competition between squadrons within the group is greater than between cadet groups. This competition is conducted in several areas - marching, knowledge, Operational Readiness Inspections (ORIs), Saturday Morning Inspections (SAMIs), In Ranks Inspections (IRIs), safety - all of which are combined with other subjective factors to determine Squadron of the Month.

(1) Marching is graded both at parades as discussed above and during noon meal formations. The criteria are similarly subjective with questions continually arising concerning grading standards. The reward for achievement in marching is ordinal ranking from first to tenth.

(2) Squadrons also compete for high score on fourth class knowledge phase tests and in contests known as "Knowledge Bowls." While the direct participants of these contests are fourth class cadets, a significant portion of the squadron is involved in their preparation. Reward for winning these competitions is ordinal ranking recognition.

(3) ORIs are conducted periodically by members of the Cadet Group Staff. Each group has a different variation of the ORI, but it generally consists of quizzes on job duties administered to key squadron position holders and the charge of quarters (CQ). Random room and common area inspections are also conducted during an ORI. The reward is written or verbal feedback on performance and ordinal ranking within the group.

(4) SAMIs are conducted wing-wide once each month during which each cadet room and its occupants are carefully inspected by the Air Officer

Commanding, Group Staff Cadets, and upper class leaders within the squadron. This evaluation is largely subjective, although minimum standards for rooms and individual appearance are prescribed. Reward is ordinal ranking of each squadron within the group.

(5) IRIs are also conducted on a monthly basis, weather permitting. Again, officers and upper class cadets conduct the inspection of personal appearance, rifles, and procedures. This subjective evaluation is based on established standards and results in the squadrons being ordinal ranked within the group.

(6) Another area of squadron competition and recognition is safety. Each semester, the squadron with the lowest number of safety violation points is awarded the Commandant's Safety Award. The reward is primarily official recognition and congratulations.

(7) Squadron of the Month or Honor Squadron is awarded to the squadron which turns in the best overall performance in all quantifiable categories. Some subjective unquantifiable factors along with intramural athletic and academic performance are also considered. Reward for achieving this distinction is primarily published recognition, but with some groups also includes excusal from the next month's formal inspections.

c. Military competition within squadrons varies widely and includes such honors as: Element of the Week, "Doolie" of the Week, CQ of the Week, Room of the Week, etc. The tangible rewards are minimal. The purpose of such competition is to inspire stronger motivation toward excellence.

d. As individuals, cadets are exposed to and engage in considerable military competition.

(1) Starting with the fourth class year, cadets compete against each other for some of the recognition mentioned above, e.g., "Doolie" of the Week, CQ of the Week, Room of the Week, etc.

(2) One of the strongest areas of individual military competition is for ranks and position within the squadron or on the Wing/Group Staffs. These positions range from Wing Commander (Cadet Colonel) down to Squadron Administrative Clerk (Cadet Staff Sergeant) and carry commensurate levels of responsibility and prestige. Appendix 1 describes the positions and rank as they presently exist in the Cadet Wing. The reward for winning this "contest" at any level is a broader learning opportunity, official recognition on cadet ratings for a job done well, and, depending on the position, increased prestige and privilege.

(3) Another individual competition on the military side is for recognition of excellent military performance by being named to the Commandant's List. A cadet achieving a 3.0 military performance average (MPA) or higher (on a scale of 4.0) is named to the Commandant's List and wears a silver wreath on his or her uniform. Approximately one third of all cadets achieve this honor at any given time.

(4) There are 46 other individual military awards which are achieved on a competitive basis (i.e., Outstanding Group Commander, Outstanding Cadet in

Soaring, Outstanding Jumpmaster, etc.). These awards are listed in Appendix 2.

3. Academic Competition. The academic program at the Air Force Academy consumes by far the greatest amount of cadet time - approximately 75 percent. Cadets view academics as primarily an individual effort, and therefore, an individual competition (intragroup).

a. There are two general grading methods used by the faculty:

(1) The contract grading method sets a standard toward which each student is expected to strive. Grades are based on each individual's success in achieving that standard. Theoretically, every student could achieve an A, or the entire class could fail a course depending upon student success against the standard. (In reality, the "standard" must occasionally be adjusted to avoid inappropriate or unacceptable skewing of the system, e.g., grade inflation.)

(2) The most commonly used grading method is the "curve." Under this system, grades are awarded based upon statistical distribution of student performance. Student performance is evaluated with respect to performance of other students taking the same course.

b. In terms of intergroup competition, academic performance provides very little. Grades are compiled four times a year - mid-semester progress reports and end of semester grades - and squadrons are ordinarily ranked by aggregate grade point average. The squadron placing at the top of this academic performance list is recognized at the end of the year, so this system generates a sense of pride. In addition, academic performance is a factor in determining the Outstanding Squadron of the Year. (One reason intergroup competition - squadron vs squadron - in academics is less prevalent, may be cadet attitudes about the Honor Code. Cooperation among cadets in the academic area could be misconstrued as collusion and therefore, carry the risk of an honor violation charge.)

c. Intragroup or individual competition in both Against-Self, and Against-a-Standard forms are prevalent in the academic environment. As with military performance, outstanding academic performance is rewarded by selection to the Dean's List. All cadets with cumulative semester grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher are named to the Dean's List and display a silver star on their uniform. (A cadet who has earned the distinction of being on both the Dean's List and the Commandant's List is named to the Superintendent's List and wears the star surrounded by the silver wreath on his or her uniform. In addition, individual awards are given "to encourage the highest standards of scholarly achievement among graduating cadets." These 52 individual awards include 22 Academic Majors Awards, 15 Academic Departmental Awards, and 15 other academic awards. The specific awards are listed in Appendix 2.

4. Athletic Competition. As with the other two mission elements, competition in the athletic arena is present in each form, however, the intergroup form of competition predominates.

a. A strong competitive spirit exists among the intercollegiate sports activities. The Air Force Academy fields 17 men's teams and 12 women's teams to compete with other service academies and colleges across the nation. Squadron competition is introduced into the intercollegiate arena through competition for

the Gillen-Slezak Trophy. This is an award given to the squadron which demonstrated the greatest participation in varsity or junior varsity programs.

b. Intramural sports contests between the cadet squadrons are conducted throughout the academic year over three seasons - fall, winter, and spring. These generate nearly as much (and in some cases more) spirit and enthusiasm as intercollegiate sports. Each squadron is required to field teams in 17 sport events in scheduled competition with other squadrons. These are truly squadron/team efforts and winning is very important to squadron morale and identity. The squadron that turns in the best winning record at the end of the year is awarded the coveted Malanaphy Trophy.

c. Two other areas of strong intra-squadron athletic competition, which include significant elements of competition, Against-a-Standard and Against-Self, are the physical fitness test (PFT) and aerobic test. These activities challenge each cadet to perform at his or her best in a series of physical exercises - running, long jump, pushups, pullups, and situps. Individuals are rated and the aggregate squadron performance is measured, leading again to an ordinal ranking of squadrons.

d. In addition, athletic activities contribute to academic competition in that some of the physical education courses are graded and figure into the cadet's overall GPA.

e. On the individual competition level, there are Wing Open events in boxing, racquet ball, and squash. In addition to these, there are more than 30 individual athletic awards which are listed in Appendix 2.

5. Summary. In this section, an attempt has been made to describe the competitive environment at the Air Force Academy by enumerating specific formal competitive activities in each mission element. No attempt has been made to rank order or prioritize these activities since each cadet undoubtedly does this in his or her own mind independently.

a. A good deal of the competition environment make-up is informal and has not been addressed. The Against-Self form of competition against "the system," that is, breaking a regulation and not being caught; not meeting dress standards and getting by (for a while); "gaming" an academic course and passing, etc.

b. Figure 2 on the following page shows the types of competition roughly quantified, as found in each mission element. There are approximately 130 "contests" which fall into the intragroup or individual activity category and 15 activities which can be categorized as intergroup contests requiring a team effort.

Figure 2.

Competitive Activities Summary

<u>MISSION ELEMENT</u>	<u>AGAINST SELF</u>	<u>AGAINST STANDARD</u>	<u>INTRAGROUP (individual)</u>	<u>INTERGROUP</u>
Military	(Note 1)	(Note 2)	51 (Note 5)	9 (Note 8)
Academic	(Note 1)	(Note 3)	44 (Note 6)	1 (Note 9)
Athletic	(Note 1)	(Note 4)	35 (Note 7)	5 (Note 10)

NOTES:

1. Competition Against Self is difficult to quantify. This form of competition is present in all three elements.
2. While standards are established for most military activities, the reward is generally relative to others and recognition is ordinal ranking.
3. In those courses that are graded by "contract", competition can be classified as Against a Standard.
4. The PFT, aerobics, and those physical education courses graded pass/fail can be classified as Against a Standard.
5. This figure includes all the individual achievements that receive formal recognition including the Commandant's List. Counted as only one activity is the promotion list competition which includes 388 cadet officer and 950 cadet NCO positions three times during the academic year, and slightly less than that number of positions 2 to 3 times for summer programs.
6. This figure assumes GPA as one competitive activity rather than taking each course separately. It also includes the Dean's List and 42 individual achievement awards.
7. The PFT and aerobics are considered to be both an individual and squadron competitive activity. The three Wing Open contests are counted as one activity each, as are each of the 30 individual awards.
8. These are the between groups and between squadron activities described in para 2a and 2b of this section.
9. This is between squadron competition described in para 3b.
10. Since there are three intramural/intercollegiate sports seasons, a cadet has three opportunities to compete on a team each year. In addition, the PFT and aerobic tests are viewed as squadron/team efforts.

#### SECTION IV

##### APPRAISAL OF THE COMPETITIVE CLIMATE AT THE U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY

1. The overall climate of competition was assessed by interviewing six randomly selected groups of twelve cadets from three squadrons. The squadrons from which the cadets were selected were ranked in the top four, the middle, and the lowest four squadrons, during the 1979 Outstanding Squadron competition.

a. Questions asked of these cadets were designed to uncover their perceptions of the system and its impact on those who live under it. To stimulate discussion, these key questions were asked of each group:

- (1) What are the institutional reasons for competition here at the U.S. Air Force Academy?
- (2) What are the consequences brought about by such a system?
- (3) Who wins and who loses?
- (4) What does it mean to win or lose?
- (5) If you could change one thing about the system, what would you change?

b. In response to these questions, a great deal of discussion ensued. No attempt was made to structure the answers except to probe for explanation and to determine to what extent perceptions were shared. It must be remembered that the information gathered in this manner is perceptive. It is not necessarily accurate or factual. It is, none the less, reality to the cadets themselves.

2. The first question, "What are the institutional reasons for competition at USAFA?" was asked to assess the cadets' conception of the competition system "as it should be" in its ideal form. Most replies centered around two reasons: it improves performance and it builds teamwork.

a. It was widely believed that competition increased the quantity of performance by "making people work when they would otherwise loaf", and the quality of performance by "making a person set higher goals...adhere to higher standards and, in general, produces a better product." Competition was described by many as a central aspect of life itself. Many comparisons were made between life at the Academy and that to be found in the civilian sector or the "real Air Force". Typical of such comments were:

Through your career you will be competing with others...  
We are told to get used to the pressure because it's out there...  
We must get used to competition, for the Air Force is like that...  
Life is like that.



b. Another rationale for having a competitive system was described by several cadets as:

They're laying a foundation here of "we don't always win" and if we get defeated here and learn to accept defeat, after we get out of the Academy...we can accept it there.

c. Along with recognizing the traditional aspects and the unusual point of view of learning to accept failure, competition was seen as necessary to teach persons their limits and capabilities. This purpose was described as:

It teaches us to deal with the pressures we will encounter in the Air Force...like working under time constraints and in combat.

When you get out and get into the cockpit, you're under a lot of pressure, especially if there is a MIG on your tail; it's like simulated combat.

Competition, then, is seen as a necessary part of the training they must receive in preparation for officership.

d. A positive aspect of the system is that it enhances self-esteem. To this end, it was alleged to:

Build confidence in the individual. To give you a sense of self-esteem...to add to the image of the Academy within the Air Force.

In light of the previous comments about dealing with failure, we suspect self-esteem enhancement is realized only by the few who win in this system.

e. Another way in which competition was described as improving performance is that it serves to screen out those who wouldn't make it as officers. It was described as an assessment device used by the system and the individuals in the system.

It allows us to compare ourselves with other cadets.

It is a measuring device used by the institution to measure future performance.

We're an investment for the taxpayers so they use it as a quality control process.

Ideally, then, one primary purpose of the competition system is to increase the quantity and quality of performance. In so doing, it prepares cadets for officership and screens out those who cannot perform adequately.

f. The other primary purpose of the system is to build teamwork. Initially, few comments were offered about teamwork as a reason for competition, but when the investigators probed this as a possibility, it generated much talk. Typical comments offered suggested:

It gets people to work together as a unit, as opposed to a bunch of individuals; especially in military and athletics.

Once offered, such statements received general agreement from all in a manner which suggested such ideas were widely taught but not readily seen as a reality.

3. Institutions do not always live up to their own ideals. To check for differences between the real situation and what was hoped to be achieved by the system, we asked the question, "What are the consequences brought about by such a system?" Replies suggested a real difference between the ideals and actuality of the system in several areas.

a. First, it was very clear that teamwork was not perceived as a primary emphasis of the system except in intramurals and a few military activities. Typical of the comments which support this contention was:

"Team, team, team" that's all you hear in BCT, but once you get into your squadron you are rated one against another. The institution talks about teamwork but the competition is on an individual basis.

The reward system, catalogued earlier, confirms this view. Also, the comparative evaluation for rewards, characteristic of curve grading in academics and the forced distribution of military rating, causes the cadets to see their teammates as competition. The result is sometimes worse than the absence of teamwork, it is fragmentation.

b. The second major result of the present system is that performance is not necessarily improved. There was a great deal of talk about "shooting for the mean" and the "decrease in quality" which has accompanied an "increase in quantity" present in the system. Their attitude toward the situation was:

We get tired of it...sometimes we just want to enjoy life; competition is pulling us in so many different directions, it's about to tear us apart...Sometimes to comply with one requirement, it precludes doing another....and you get hit. It's like they want you to win in all areas...it's impossible!...We are deemphasizing quality for quantity. Often the rules become so important they stifle initiative and creativity... We learn to play the game rather than think...You are forced to mimic, rather than think...you get to a point where you say, "who wants it?." You get into honor classes and all you are getting into is a higher bracket of competition...who needs it?

c. These dilemmas are not without solution. Cadets adapt well and they clearly described their coping strategy:

It gets to the point where you have to pick and choose what you want to compete in and what you want to "kiss off." In some cases...cadets only try to achieve the mean because there is just too much.

(1) The decision as to which areas to emphasize seems to be driven by structural characteristics of the system: the imbalance between major areas of effort and the methods of grading. The imbalance and associated risk analysis is illustrated by these comments:

You have to be competitive in academics to stay there. People are competitive in athletics because they enjoy it. Then, in the military area, you just get sick of it, and if there is somewhere you are going to "take a blow", that's where you do it. They stress the Whole-Man concept, but end up with a lot of lopsided people.

(2) The problem of grading is twofold: it is subjective and relative. Subjectivity makes competition chancy to people who are not high risk takers (characteristic of high need achievers.) The subjectivity was clearly described in many areas:

Often getting on Comm's List is simply a matter of reading your AOC...I just hide those things that he might not like...and appear spotlessly clean in front of him. That's all that matters.

It carries over to academics. When the instructor must make MPA ratings, he looks around and sees the Comm's pins...you get labeled that way.

The thing I find most frustrating about competition around here is competition in areas where you can't measure it...you think you are doing the greatest job but then it comes down that you didn't do as well as a guy who didn't put in half the effort but did it differently.

(3) The second characteristic of the grading system, grading on a curve or distribution, permeates the current system in both military and academic areas. Cadets quickly realize that they cannot beat everyone so they pick and choose what areas to emphasize. In all other areas they accept minimum performance. Many echoed the adage that "if the minimum was not good enough it wouldn't be the minimum." The result is half-hearted effort in most areas and maximum effort in only a few.

(4) Given these characteristics of the current system, that is, the imbalance of institutional emphasis and the grading system which is unclear and relative, the coping strategy used by cadets seems to be the only realistic response possible. In effect, they are doing a risk analysis (assessing their probability of success or failure in each area), and then they try to maximize their payoffs.

d. What these comments seem to be describing is a system which may have gone astray and is no longer accomplishing the goals it was designed to achieve. This competition system, which according to the cadet's perceptions was set up to improve performance and build teamwork, in some cases apparently has the opposite effect. The result, obvious from their comments, is frustration because they live in an environment replete with conflict. If left uncorrected, they will naturally exercise their only other options which will reduce their

frustration. These are rejection of the system (attrition) and apathy toward competition. Proper adjustment of this system requires a thorough understanding of the major factors operating to create dysfunction. The two most discrepant outcomes noted in these interviews, fragmentation and decreased performance will be discussed next.

4. The fragmentation described by cadets had several dimensions:

Individual and group apathy; squadron impact; teamwork - overall; and academic fragmentation.

a. "Apathy" is a characteristic which cadets described in themselves. This phenomenon starts as individual behavior but appears to develop into a group phenomenon.

Apathy is more accepted (here) than conflict, so people appear not to care rather than fight with their fellow cadets.

Group apathy is an accepted way out when there is no other way to turn. If not accepted, it is at least prevalent.

This sense of apathy appears to be a result, at least in part, of the impact competition has on squadron life. There seems to be a negative correlation between the degree of competition and the quality of squadron life. Squadrons which are highly competitive in orientation tend to be described as "places" where cadets exist, not live. One cadet described the situation in a competitive squadron this way:

"The more we try to compete as a squadron, the less cohesive we are. When we lose, there is a lot of finger pointing."

(1) The observations of individuals who were reassigned between squadrons confirmed the apparent correlation between competition and quality of life.

In my doolie squadron we really worked together and stressed teamwork but we were 30th in academics and 28th in intramurals. Nobody really cared because we were working together as a team. I saw so much more teamwork in my other squadron which was "losing" than I did in this squadron which was an honor squadron.

It (ill effects of competition) was in my other squadron which stressed competition; I hated it; people were on you; a lot of back stabbing, yet we won Squadron of the Month. This squadron is much closer yet not doing as well as others, but there's better learning, better leadership and getting more from the institution.

Last year (in the honor squadron) we probably had the most friction of any squadron in the Wing. The firsties all hated us (2). It wasn't a great squadron to live in.

(2) There was much frustration in cadet comments when they were asked to speak of competition in areas which are actually individual efforts, specifically academics, yet these areas are the foundation of inter-squadron standings. In fact, competition in academics seems to force one to go it alone, and cooperation, reported by at least one cadet, is viewed as "an opportunity to cheat the system." Frustration appears to be a result of the system's forcing individual efforts, but at the same time, artificially creating a sense of competition by rank ordering squadron academic standings.

(3) In summary, the fragmentation described by cadets as a major outcome of this system of competition has many dimensions. Individual apathy is an attempt to reduce the conflict inherent in a system that forces group effort over a wide range of activities. Apathy may appear to be less destructive to the group than heated negotiation over how individual effort should be allocated. Individual apathies, widely accepted, become the squadron norm manifested as group apathy. Some squadrons elect not to be apathetic and to commit their resources to the competition and make extreme demands on individuals which impact adversely on the quality of squadron life. Generating team competition artificially, by summing individual efforts as a group effort, only serves to create the heated negotiation situation that the apathy was designed to alleviate. Further, it puts the squadron in the untenable situation of high task interdependence and differential reward. All of these factors serve to promote fragmentation among cadets in the basic squadron group.

5. Competition, as understood by cadets, is for purposes of performance improvement. But the nature of the comments generated by the discussion groups points to an almost opposite effect. In fact, in most cases, competition causes coping behavior which deliberately decreases performance in one or more areas in order to sustain higher performance in yet another area.

a. The question that one can ask is "how is it that a system of competition designed and perceived to increase individual and collective performance actually produces this unintended outcome of reduced performance in many areas. The answer to this important question appears again in comments generated by the cadets. They expressed the most concern for the grading system which in turn contributes to ordinal standing and as a result drives competition. In describing the system many spoke of the lack of performance criteria and the emphasis on subjective or hidden performance criteria.

In the military area the grading is completely subjective, there is little feedback, and we are usually caught by surprise when it comes.

It all comes back to the fact that the grading here is subjective and there is no way to tell what is going on with those that are grading.

It is most interesting to note that in competitive systems not based on clearly defined performance criteria, performance feedback becomes important but is perceived to be virtually lacking.

The competition is great in areas where you can tell where you are standing, but you get into a situation where you are competing and have no idea where you stand - no feedback - you don't know where you are going to come out; that demotivates me, completely.

Furthermore, their sense of surprise about the choice of honor squadron speaks powerfully on this same issue.

You don't go for Honor Squadron, it just happens.

The really funny thing about us getting Honor Squadron last year is that the two years prior to that we were sure that we had it. There was no question whatsoever and another squadron was announced. Everyone was shocked...The squadron that won even thought that we had it. Everyone in the Wing thought we had it...that's the frustrating thing about it.

b. What of frustration? It certainly became evident that the quality of statements being made in these interviews spoke of a strong sense of frustration. In fact, a sense of frustration appeared to center on several themes. First, many spoke of the frustration of knowing they have tried or are doing their best at a task, only to be put down for not "winning" or contributing to the winning effort.

You get frustrated because even though you try your best, you don't always get the results other people expect of you and they get down on you. You can see it in the attrition rate.

Cadets express frustration with the subjectivity of some of the grading procedures at USAFA. The focus of this phenomenon appears to be the military and academic (curve) grading. Knowing that frustration can be tolerated only so long, cadets will tend to "do things" to minimize its effect. Knowing that frustration exists with the system to various degrees amongst its members, one can begin to develop a sense of some of the coping behaviors which are used to compensate, or to, in fact, minimize the effect of the frustration phenomenon. Several ways seem to have emerged to cope with the frustration that individuals feel relative to competition. Interestingly, some either individually or collectively, conduct a risk analysis with, surprisingly, the same results:

For me it's academics. You can get "kicked out" for academics, but very few people get "kicked out" for military or athletic deficiencies.

There are very few who can do well in all three areas. You have trade-offs. One picks priorities in terms of what one wants to excel in, with academics most chosen. It's the one area with the most risk.

Given this approach, "the minimum standard" becomes very important for the cadet, or as they say, "shooting for the min".

Take minimum and then excel in one thing; because that's realistic. It's not that people are choosing to "meet the min", but they are ending up there.

There's a lot of truth to the statement, "if it wasn't good enough it shouldn't be the minimum." Because of the constant demand, that's all you can do sometimes.

There was even talk of "kissing off" subjects and activities as a method of coping.

It's a matter of time, there are only so many hours. To survive you have to "kiss off" certain classes or do the bare minimum.

...Putting in the best effort, yet, getting nothing back for it, it caused me to lose my motivation to go on. You start "kissing things off" and get down on yourself and it starts getting worse.

One cadet appeared to sum up competition, specifically in academics, for many in the group when he said, "Competition in grades is not right. It's not showing you what you know. It's showing you what you know relative to someone else."

c. In these discussions, students began almost spontaneously to talk of the development of pride and self-esteem. They spoke often of individual sense of accomplishment towards a goal they, themselves, had defined as important, rather than seek goals defined as important by the system. When this was possible, we had an individual who was happy, self-motivated, and succeeding with the system. These people appeared to be few in number. Others speak of self-esteem and pride as something "out there" and rare to their current experiences.

It's pride which motivates at civilian schools, but here it's more like we're getting measured. We have to win because somebody is going to look at it; outside opinions matter more here.

There are even attempts at defining what self-esteem and pride represent.

My best sense of accomplishment is how I feel about myself, my self-esteem. Winning is doing what you can, the best you can, and saying, "I've done my best."

Those comments speak to the qualities which people see as necessary for self-motivating task performance. That motivation consistently appears as an internal sense of pride and purpose. It further appears that those who believe that this internal motivation can be completely fulfilled by external measures or standings without exploring the driving values are apt to frustrate, or possibly lose altogether, a large percentage of their following.

6. Underlying all these comments is the issue of quantity at the expense of quality. As a group, cadets are saying there is just so much competition that we cannot do a good job in anything. When asked, "What one thing would you change about the system of competition?" they generally replied in terms of improving quality and decreasing quantity. Typically they prescribe:

Deemphasize some of the competition - the "Mickey Mouse stuff."  
There is too much; it gets on your nerves. Concentrate on what is important.

They sense that the system has lost sight of what it is supposed to accomplish and, without clear goals, just emphasizes everything.

a. While the system may be wrestling with the issues of purpose and quality, the cadets have described five characteristics which they feel constitutes a quality program of competition. These characteristics are: group participation, relevancy to Air Force officership, challenge, immediate and continued feedback, and temporary or short term risk.

(1) Group Participation allows a sharing of the risk and social support in frustrating situations. It is the essence of the teamwork ideal upon which the current system has been built. Relative ratings of different types of competition illustrate the importance of this characteristic:

If you had to rate the quality of competition here, it would be athletics, military and academics. The reason athletics is more enjoyable is because it builds more unity... You don't ever have an academic pep rally!

(2) The second major characteristic which, in the cadet's perception, constitutes a quality activity is relevancy to the cadet experience but especially to the Air Force officer experience.

This isn't the real Air Force, but if this is an Air Force Academy, they should infuse as much of the Air Force into the Academy as they can.

Activities that are not seen as relevant are not that important in the long term.

It's all the same in the end. I don't think I've lost (the competition) if I can walk across the stage at the stadium when I graduate, then I've won. When you leave here, everyone's the same anyway.

The impact of irrelevancy on attrition was clearly illustrated by several cadets:

One of the primary reasons people give for leaving is a "change in career goals", but I think they just lose sight of why they came here... they lose sight of what the Air Force means to them.



(3) The third important characteristic of a quality competitive program is that it should be challenging. This also impacts on attrition:

When people get here and are exposed to the system they develop a negative attitude... get into a rut. To counteract this, the administration tries to appease the cadets and this only makes things worse because we lose that which sets us off from other colleges and universities. We are no longer elite and it impacts on attrition because there is nothing special about being here. Competition is part of what makes this place elite.

The prescription offered by many cadets is:

Make the system harder. In their effort to get people to stay, this place no longer meets the expectations of those who come here. That sets people up for a disappointment.

(4) Many comments suggested a need for immediate and continual feedback. Many cadets agreed with the comment that there is a lack of positive direction in the current system:

The only time we get immediate performance feedback is when we mess up.

Their message, in this regard is clear:

Force as much feedback as possible. Provide constant performance counseling. Let people know where they are at, where they stand. Give them a reason to perform.

(5) The last characteristic they suggested was to reduce the long term aspects of the risk. This is one difference they see in respect to their civilian counterparts:

I don't think that in the real world you are always told exactly how you stand in relation to everyone else.

Not only are they constantly measured against each other, but often they are labeled and carry that label for their entire Academy experience. The process was described as follows:

It's the visibility which builds on itself. People not getting it are dropping to the depths of obscurity. Once you start losing, you always stay down, unless you do something exceptional.

Losers stay losers: it's like falling...people get mandatories written on them semester after semester. Even when you switch squadrons you're wearing a Commandant's Pin. When it comes time to award the Comm's Pin, people look around to see who's wearing them.

When you've got the Comm's Pin, you automatically get the good jobs. Someone has to be on the bottom. Generally, once you start getting mandatories, you keep getting them.

In this way, what may seem to be a short term risk incurs a long term label which is virtually inescapable. A quality program, according to cadets, would be one in which a failure is a set-back, not a disaster.

b. These comments, supplied by cadets who must live under this sytem day in and day out are insightful. They seem to indicate what the institution can do to correct a competitive system that has become dysfunctional. In any case, concentration on quality as opposed to quantity seems to be the underlying theme. In so doing, it seems logical that problems of fragmentation and decreased performance could also be corrected.

## SECTION V

### ANALYSIS OF THE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT AT THE USAF ACADEMY

1. Introduction: In Section II of this study, competition was defined and the expectations and risk vs payoff were explored in theory. Then, in Section III, an attempt was made to catalogue descriptively those activities which create the competitive environment at the Air Force Academy. Some of the cadet perspectives on the competitive nature of their lives were presented in the last section. The next step is to analyze this information from two aspects.

a. First, in terms of academic theory, what are the expected outcomes of the kinds of competitive activities in which Air Force Cadets participate: That is, should we expect cadets to achieve increased self-esteem, greater anxiety, stronger sense of group identity, etc? Should group productivity or quality of work improve?

b. Then considering the expected outcomes, is the competitive environment at the Air Force Academy consistent with the stated or implied institutional goals and objectives?

#### 2. Expected Outcomes.

a. To postulate the expected outcomes of competition, the four types of competition (Against Self, Against Standard, etc.) and the factors affecting a competitive system must be considered. Referring to the Competitive Activities Summary in Section III, each type of competition that exists at the Academy will be examined with respect to the four factors which characterize any competitive situation - the task, the reward system, the competitors, and the conflict environment. A subjective conclusion related to the expectations discussed in Section II will be drawn.

b. Competition Against Self was found to be present in all three mission elements. The degree of this type of competition is difficult to quantify, but given the character of young people who are selected as cadets, a valid assumption may be made that this type of competition is fairly strong. Whether the task is military performance, academic achievement, or improving athletic skills, most cadets undoubtedly strive to continually improve upon their past performance. The individual tasks range from totally independent to quite interdependent, but tasks in this category probably stack up more heavily in the independent category. Reward for self-improvement is largely individual recognition with some spillover into group gains as when individual scores are aggregated to determine squadron position. The reward system is primarily of the equity norm or unequal. The expected outcome conclusions are therefore:

(1) Increased individual productivity but lower group efficiency - particularly as the reward becomes more differentiated.

(2) No advantage in terms of group cohesion and cooperation.

(3) Increased self-esteem for those who can observe significant progress in their own performance.

(4) Possible lowering of self-esteem in those who strive hard for self-improvement but perceive little success because relative to others' recognized performance, their self-improvement is not significant. (This expected outcome was confirmed by some of the cadet comments in the last section.)

c. Competition Against a Standard is also present in all three mission elements but in varying degrees. This type of competition is greatest in the military element with the specific tasks about evenly distributed between dependence (as in marching) and independence (as in CQ of the Week). The reward structure tends heavily toward the equity norm. The most evident examples of these rewards are the Commandant's List recognition and published ordinal ranking based on excellence in achievement against the standard (except "the standard" is not always well defined). Another example of equity or unequally distributed reward is "curve" grading in academic courses. The expected outcomes of competition against a standard at the Academy would be:

(1) Increased individual productivity and increased group efficiency as the tasks become more dependent (i.e. marching).

(2) Greater group cohesion and identity in those areas where cooperation is required.

(3) Complementing group versus individual motives in activities where both are rewarded such as PFT performance; however, some conflict in areas where the individual meets or exceeds the standard but reward is differentiated (i.e. Cadet X meets or exceeds inspection standards but receives little or no recognition because of ordinal ranking recognition).

(4) Frustration and discouragement when, because of equity reward (i.e., few "winners"), the standard is achieved with no recognition. That is, being identified as a "loser" even after having met or exceeded the standard.

d. Intragroup or individual competition is clearly the most predominant type of competition at the Academy except in the athletic area. The tasks in the military and academic elements are primarily independent with only a few requiring dependence on fellow cadets. Reward in this category is almost exclusively differential in that most of these activities have only one "winner" - notably the 46 individual military awards, the 42 individual academic achievement awards, and the 35 individual athletic awards. The strong competition for cadet military positions and rank is largely an independent task in a partially structured conflict environment. The rewards are extremely differentiated with only a relatively few choice leadership positions. The expected outcomes of intragroup competition involving mostly independent tasks and differential rewards are:

(1) Low efficiency and productivity since the individual excels at the expense of other group members.

(2) Decreased group cohesion and identity.

(3) Enhanced self-esteem of those who achieve the individual recognition (the winners).

(4) Possible negative motivation factor for all the "losers" in these individual contests.

e. Intergroup competition is found primarily in the military and athletic mission elements. The military tasks on which squadrons are rated are primarily dependent, i.e., marching, inspections, knowledge bowls, Squadron of the Month, etc. The conflict environment is partially structured. That is, there are rules, standards, and criteria well established for these activities, as well as some latitude available for flexibility and innovation. The reward system, however, is exclusively differential.

In each of these intergroup contests, there is a winner and a loser (or possibly many losers, as with a parade competition). The conclusions that can be drawn for expected outcomes of this type of competition are:

(1) Increased group cohesion and performance during preparation for these activities and for the winners of the contests.

(2) Enhanced self-esteem and confidence for members of the winning groups.

(3) Potentially decreased self-esteem for the losers of each "contest". (e.g., in a Wing Parade, 40 squadrons compete, one squadron wins and 39 may be identified as losers - even if all 40 squadrons did very well against the standard.)

f. Summarizing the expectations of the four types of competition engaged in by Air Force Academy cadets, two factors stand out. First, the specific tasks are by and large independent, and secondly, the reward system is generally one of equity, that is differentiated. Thus, the net expected outcomes in terms of the individual are reduced identity within a group and lower motivation to cooperate toward a common goal. In terms of the group, the net expected outcomes are reduced cohesion, and lower efficiency or productivity. Another possible expected outcome would be lower self-esteem for the majority of the participants since they are the "losers". On the other hand, for those intergroup competitive activities, particularly where the rewards are more of the equality norm, the traditional positive expectations should prevail. This is confirmed by the cadet enthusiasm for intramural team competitions.

### 3. Consistency with Institutional Goals.

a. The Superintendent says, as an introduction to the U.S. Force Academy Catalog, the "developing of future officers with the knowledge, character, and motivation to become leaders in the United States Air Force is the Academy mission." More specific goals are stated throughout the catalog:

- Build a sense of unity
- Develop leadership skills
- Develop sense of identity
- Provide challenge
- Encourage high standards
- Develop teamwork and loyalty
- Increase self-confidence and self-discipline
- Inspire spirit and pride
- Acquire broad education
- Develop intellectual traits
- Instill confidence to face stress
- Encourage initiative
- Develop courage and self control
- Acquire athletic skills

These goals are aimed toward developing future officers as leaders and Air Force team members. How then, does the competitive environment at the Academy contribute to these objectives?

b. The activities which are categorized as competition against self and competition against a standard would appear to support the goals of providing a challenge, increasing self-confidence, developing intellectual traits, and acquiring athletic skills (to some extent). How much those activities contribute to achieving the goals is partially a function of the reward. The winners of the differentiated rewards certainly progress more rapidly toward the stated goals; the losers may possibly regress. (For example, a squadron meets marching standards but is a loser because ordinal ranking puts several squadrons above them in subjective grading. Members of that squadron lose self-confidence and are frustrated by the subjective challenge.) The activities in the Against Standard and Against Self categories contribute little to the goals of building a sense of unity, developing leadership, developing teamwork and loyalty, and inspiring spirit and pride - particularly as reward is differentiated.

c. The intragroup or individual competitive activities provide a challenge, encourage high standards, increase self-confidence and pride (in the winners), and encourage initiative. These activities, however, are probably somewhat counterproductive toward achieving group and team-related goals of building unity, developing leadership, developing teamwork and loyalty, and inspiring spirit and team identity. The negative aspects of the individual competitive activities become more pronounced as the winner/loser ratio tends toward fewer winners.

d. Intergroup competitive activities would appear to be most consistent with the majority of the institutional goals. These activities promote unity, teamwork, spirit, pride, identity, develop leadership, etc. As with the other forms of competition, however, the more differentiated the reward, and the more independent the task, the less positive impact results.

## SECTION VI

### CONCLUSIONS

1. The subject of competition is quite complex even when the scope is limited to definition, expectations, and factors affecting the competitive situation. When individual attitudes and motives are added to the equation, the topic becomes even more complex. Superimposing an existing competitive environment (such as at the Air Force Academy) on the problem, and accurately evaluating how well that competition contributes to institutional goals approaches the impossible. As a means to provide some sort of goal for the committee to aim toward, a list of questions was developed early on. These questions are in Appendix 3. The conclusions presented in this section address many of those questions and also reflect the opinions of the committee as they relate to the analysis presented in the previous section.

2. Following are the 1980 Committee's conclusions:

a. Competition is clearly necessary at the Air Force Academy, both as a means to inspire greater achievement, and as an important ingredient to building "the character essential to leadership."

b. Competition as it exists at the Academy is not systematic at all. Rather, a competitive environment exists that evolved over the years through many uncoordinated, although well-intentioned efforts. In many ways, it has become dysfunctional and is not achieving overall positive "traditional" benefits of competition. For example, there is evidence that through group dynamics performance actually decreases rather than increases as a result of over-saturation with competitive activities. There are indications of considerable fragmentation within squadrons as a result of conflicting attitudes toward the competitive system. There is also a strong sense of individual achievement first and team contribution second.

c. Quality competitive activities for the cadets have given way to quantity. The strong sense of coping, "meeting the min", and prioritizing by "kissing off" certain areas that came from the cadet interviews confirms this conclusion. Personal experience and observations of the committee members also support this conclusion.

d. The competitive environment at the Air Force Academy is largely non-supportive of the institutional goals. Roughly 90 percent of the awards and recognition are individual, while the notions of teamwork, leadership, group identity, and unity are stated institutional objectives. This contradiction of reality vs idealism was reinforced in cadet interview comments. A serious consequence of this imbalance is that a large majority of cadets are deprived of the positive benefits of competition since relatively few have the opportunity to "win". However, squadron team competition in athletics is healthy and contributes well to institutional goals.

e. There is a significant change in cadet attitudes toward teamwork after they leave BCT to enter the academic year squadrons. A strong sense of unity and team cooperation gives way to an "out for number one" philosophy. This attitude is reinforced by the present reward structure.

f. The reward system here tends overwhelmingly toward the equity or differentiated norm - curve grading, ordinal ranking, one winner. This causes a situation where the winner/loser ratio is unbalanced (many losers and only a few winners in most areas). In addition, this type of reward system leaves little opportunity for recognizing improvement. A squadron could work its way up from 39th place to 5th place and still not be in the "winner's circle".

g. Grading criteria and standards for many of the competitive activities are vague. This is a source of frustration for the cadets which encourages apathy - "...there is no way to tell what is going on with those that are grading."

h. Neither the cadets nor the faculty nor AOCs have a thorough understanding of the purpose, expectations, and risk vs payoff of competition. The rationale for competition given by several cadets as "learning to accept defeat" is disturbing evidence that the Academy is missing the mark in this respect.

i. Teamwork or cooperative competitive efforts are virtually non-existent in the academic area. With approximately 75 percent of the cadets' time devoted to academics, and 98 percent of the academic recognition being individual, one would not expect to achieve goals of group unity, cohesiveness, identity, etc. Aggregating individual academic achievements by squadron to produce a "team score" is artificial however. If you want squadron overdrive performance to be a team effort rather than an aggregate of individual performance, a strong squadron academic study program should be encouraged. One difficulty may be that the Cadet Honor Code discourages academic team cooperation for fear of accusations of collusion.

j. Curve grading and ordinal ranking of groups or individuals are the predominant means of competitive evaluations. While the "winners" in these evaluations may experience the resulting positive benefits, these evaluation methods produce many more "losers" than would alternative systems, i.e., contract grading or descriptive evaluation terms such as Outstanding, Excellent, Satisfactory, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory.

k. While a good portion of the competitive environment is "structured" the participants (and often times the administrators) do not have access to the rules or evaluation methods. The criteria for Outstanding Squadron or Squadron of the Month, for example, are not well defined or publicized. This leads to disappointment and frustration for the competitors.

l. Feedback on performance is neither frequent nor specific enough. Parades, for example, result in ordinal ranking for squadrons without specific performance evaluations. Another example is MPA debriefing which usually occurs only twice a year. Unless a cadet is in trouble he or she gets very little feedback between formal debriefings.



## SECTION VII

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the conclusions of the competition study committee, several recommendations appear to be in order. Some of these recommendations could be implemented immediately. Others will require more time and study. Suggested OPRs for implementation or further study are indicated.

2. Recommendations:

a. The U.S. Air Force Academy should continue to foster a healthy sense of competition in every mission element. Competition correctly used can inspire higher levels of achievement and contribute to developing those elements of character essential to leadership. (OPR: All)

(1) The cadet squadron should be emphasized as the basic unit for competition, recognition, and reward to foster a spirit of identity, cohesiveness and cooperation. Additional squadron activities such as squadron hikes, obstacle course, runs, leadership building exercises, etc., should be encouraged.

(2) Another technique that might be pursued is unit awards in the form of ribbons, to be worn on the uniform such as is done in ROTC, e.g., outstanding unit, honor squadron, Superintendent's unit citation for performance, etc.

b. The entire recognition and rewards program described in Section III and Appendix 3 should be reviewed with an eye toward creating a cooperative and coherent competitive system. This system should emphasize teamwork and group cooperation rather than individual achievement. (OPR: CW, DF, AH)

(1) The number of individual awards should be reduced and team/squadron awards should be increased.

(2) Every award or official recognition should consciously support one or more of the stated institutional objectives. (OPR: CW, AH, DF)

c. The quantity of competitive activities should be reduced to eliminate as much as possible the "forced competition in every area" perception of cadets. This would allow cadets to focus their energies and reduce their need to "meet the min" or "kiss off" certain areas. (OPR: CW, DF, AH)

d. Positive steps should be taken through both the cadet chain of command and AOCs to instill a strong sense of squadron/team identity during the academic year. The "out for number one" attitude needs to be reversed through positive actions and group (squadron) recognition to reinforce the teamwork aspect of the cadet's development. (OPR: CW)

e. Curve grading should be eliminated in every possible instance. Contract grading using specific performance criteria should predominate in academic, military studies, and physical education classes. (OPR: CW, DF, AH)

f. Ordinal ranking of individuals, squadron, and groups should be eliminated in every possible instance. Descriptive terms such as Outstanding, Excellent, Satisfactory, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory should be substituted as evaluation feedback. (Records on point standings could still be maintained for differentiating between individuals and squadrons in determining Outstanding Squadron of the Year, etc. These terms are also consistent with what cadets will experience in the Air Force and during Stan/Eval inspections.) (OPR: CW)

g. Grading standards and "rules of engagement" should be explicitly defined in every area of competition. These standards and rules should be readily available to both cadets and those people charged with supervising the various competitive activities (AOCs, faculty, and athletic instructors). (OPR: CW, DF, AH)

h. A briefing addressing the purpose, expectations, and potential risk/pay-off aspects of competition should be developed and presented to cadets and AOCs. (OPR: DF)

i. Grading and feedback, particularly in the military performance area, should be more specific. Grades of Outstanding, Excellent, Marginal, etc., should be awarded for such activities as inspections and marching. (OPR: CW)

j. An implementation committee of appropriate level CW, DF and AH representatives should be appointed to implement those recommendations that are accepted. (OPR: SUPT)

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APPENDIX I

CADET POSITIONS AND RANK AT THE USAF ACADEMY

CADET WING STAFF

Commander (Colonel)	Logistics Officer (Major)
Vice Commander (Colonel)	Training Officer (Major)
Professional Ethics Chairman (Lt Col)	Logistics Sergeant (SMSgt)
Sergeant Major (CMSgt)	Transportation Sergeant (SMSgt)
Operations Sergeant (SMSgt)	Training Sergeant (SMSgt)
Academic/Athletic Officer (Major)	Color Bearer (TSgt)
Executive Officer (Major)	Color Guard (SSgt)
Safety Officer (Major)	Group Commander (Colonel)
Administrative Sergeant (SMSgt)	Group Commander (Colonel)
Activities Sergeant (SMSgt)	Group Commander (Colonel)
Information Sergeant (SMSgt)	Group Commander (Colonel)

Totals: 8 Officer and 10 NCO positions

CADET GROUP STAFF (4 GROUPS)

Commander (Colonel)	Training Officer (Captain)
Deputy Commander (Lt Colonel)	Academic/Athletic Officer (Captain)
Sergeant Major (SMSgt)	Training Sergeant (MSgt)
Safety Sergeant (MSgt)	10 Squadron Commanders (Lt Colonel)
Executive Officer (Captain)	
Administrative Sergeant (MSgt)	
Logistics Sergeant (MSgt)	

Totals: 20 Officer and 20 NCO positions

CADET SQUADRON STAFF (40 SQUADRONS)

Commander (Lt Colonel)	Executive Officer (Captain)
First Sergeant (MSgt)	Logistics Sergeant (TSgt)
Safety Sergeant (TSgt)	Administrative Sergeant (TSgt)
Athletic Officer (1st Lt)	Appointment Clerk (SSgt)
Academic Officer (1st Lt)	Information Sergeant (TSgt)
Training Sergeant (MSgt)	Security Sergeant (TSgt)
Ass't Training Sergeant (TSgt)	Transportation Clerk (SSgt)
Operations Officer (Major)	Logistics Clerk (SSgt)
Operations Sergeant (MSgt)	Activities Clerk (SSgt)
Guidon Bearer (SSgt)	CAS Clerk (SSgt)
Unit Color Bearer (SSgt)	Administrative Clerk (SSgt)
Flight Guide (SSgt)	Pass Clerk (SSgt)
3 Flight Commanders (Captain)	
3 Flight Sergeants (MSgt)	
3 Element Leaders (1st Lt)	
3 Element Sergeants (TSgt)	

Totals: 360 Officer and 920 NCO positions

## APPENDIX II

### SUMMARY OF CADET AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

#### 1. Objective:

The Cadet Awards program gives incentives to Air Force Academy cadets for higher achievements in academic, athletic, leadership, military training, and related activities, and recognizes achievements materially and through public recognition.

#### 2. Definitions:

a. Scholastic Honors: Order of merit, academic major awards, and academic departmental awards.

b. Military Awards: Awarded to cadets ranking highest in leadership, character development, and military scholarship.

c. Athletic awards: Awards given to acknowledge high standards of excellence in athletic and physical prowess combined with demonstrated leadership ability.

d. Specialty Awards: Awards established for specific purposes and presented at various times during the year. These awards recognize cadets who distinguish themselves by outstanding performance and achievement in individual academic disciplines or special area of interest.

#### MILITARY AWARDS

1. CW Awards (Individual)	OPR
a. Cadet Wing Commander	CWD
b. Outstanding Group Commander	CWD
c. Outstanding Cadet Squadron Commander	CWD
d. Outstanding Cadet in Airmanship	CWOA
e. Outstanding Cadet in Military Training	CWIT
f. Outstanding Cadet in Navigation	CWIN
g. Outstanding Cadet in Parachuting	CWOA
h. Outstanding Cadet in Powered Flight	CWOA
i. Outstanding Cadet in Soaring	CWOA
j. Chairperson, Cadet Professional Ethics Committee	CWH
k. Ideals of Loyalty, Integrity, Courage	CWD

1. Advancement in MT/Leadership	CWIT
2. Individual Awards - Specialty	OPR
a. List of Outstanding Commanders	
(1) Promotion List Outstanding Squadron Commander (3)	CWD
(2) Promotion List Outstanding Flight Commander (3)	CWD
(3) Promotion List Outstanding First Sergeant (3)	CWD
(4) Promotion List Outstanding Element Leader (3)	CWD
(5) Promotion List Outstanding Element Sergeant (3)	CWD
b. Talon Editor	CWRM
c. Polaris Editor	CWRM
d. Outstanding Basic Cadet Achievement	CWD
e. Outstanding Basic Cadet Training Flight Commander (2)	CWD
f. Outstanding Basic Cadet Training Element Leader (2)	CWD
g. Outstanding Basic Cadet Training Squadron Commander (2)	CWD
h. Outstanding Basic Cadet Training Element (Sergeants) (2)	CWD
i. Outstanding Cadet (Student/Cadre) SERE for all 3 periods	CWIT/SERE
j. Outstanding Cadet in Soaring (Bowley Trophy)	CWOA
k. Outstanding Basic Cadet Training Instructor (2)	CWIT
l. Outstanding Jumpmaster	CWOA
m. Outstanding Competition Parachutist	CWOA
n. Outstanding Demonstration Parachutist	CWOA
3. Organizational Awards Specialty	OPR
a. Group Squadron of the Month	CWD
b. Group Outstanding Squadron	CWD
c. Wing Safety (each semester)	CWD
d. Outstanding Basic Cadet Training Squadron	CWD

## SCHOLASTIC HONORS

1. Scholastic Honors: These awards are given to encourage the highest standards of scholarly achievement among graduating cadets and are presented as Order of Merit Awards, Academic Major Awards, and Academic Departmental Awards.

2. Order of Merit Awards

- a. Graduation order of merit
- b. Academic achievement

3. Academic Major Awards: (Outstanding Cadet)

- a. Aeronautical Engineering
- b. Astronautical Engineering
- c. Behavioral Sciences and Leadership
- d. Chemistry
- e. Civil Engineering
- f. Computer Science
- g. Economics
- h. Electrical Engineering
- i. Engineering Mechanics
- j. Engineering Sciences
- k. Social Sciences
- l. Geography
- m. History
- n. International Affairs
- o. Mathematical Sciences
- p. Management
- q. Physics
- r. Aviation Sciences
- s. Basic Sciences
- t. Biological Sciences



u. Humanities

v. Operations Research

4. Academic Departmental Awards: These awards to cadets recognize outstanding scholastic achievement in a specific academic field or department.

a. Aerodynamics and Flight Mechanics

b. Engineering

c. English

d. Far Eastern Language

e. French Language

f. German Language

g. Intercollegiate Speech Competition

h. Law

i. Military History

j. National Security Studies

k. Philosophy

l. Political Science

m. Russian Language

n. Spanish Language

o. Thermodynamics and Propulsion

5. Academic Awards

OPR

a. Outstanding Fourth Class Cadet in Intro Chem

DFACS

b. Outstanding Graduating member of the Cadet Civil Engineering Club (ASCE student chapter)

DFCEM

c. Outstanding Cadets in Mechanics 110, 210, 320

DFCEM

d. Outstanding Graduating Cadet in Engineering (Colorado Engineering Council)

DFCEM

e. Outstanding Achievement in Selected Electrical Engineering Courses

DFEE

f. Outstanding Cadet Contributor to the Electrical Engineering Program

DFEE

g. Outstanding Cadet in Creative Writing	DFEFA
h. Outstanding Cadet in Basic French	DF
i. Cadet who writes the most Outstanding Article on the History of Airpower	DFH
j. Outstanding Graduating Cadet in the prescribed Law Courses	DFL
k. Outstanding Achievement in Aeronautical Design Courses	DFAN
l. Outstanding Cadet in Basic Spanish	DFP
m. Outstanding Achievement in Selected Mathematics Courses (awarded each semester)	DFMS

#### ATHLETIC HONORS

1. Each Cadet who wins the Wing Open Boxing Competition in respective weight class.	AHP
2. Each member of winning Squadron in each intramural sport	AHP

#### ATHLETIC AWARDS

1. Athletic Excellence
2. Athletic Leadership
3. Scholar - Athletic
4. Most Valuable Athletic
5. Most Valuable Baseball Player
6. Most Valuable Basketball Player (Men and Women)
7. Most Valuable Cross-Country Runner (Men and Women)
8. Most Valuable Fencer (Men and Women)
9. Most Valuable Football Back
10. Most Valuable Football Lineman
11. Most Valuable Football Player
12. Most Valuable Golfer (Men and Women)
13. Most Valuable Gymnast (Men and Women)

14. Most Valuable Ice Hockey Player
15. Most Valuable Lacrosse Player
16. Most Valuable Marksman - Pistol
17. Most Valuable Marksman - Rifle
18. Most Valuable Water Polo Player
19. Most Valuable Soccer Player
20. Most Valuable Swimmer (Men and Women)
21. Most Valuable Tennis Player (Men and Women)
22. Most Valuable Track Participant (Men and Women)
23. Most Valuable Wrestler
24. Outstanding Cadet in Physical Education
25. Outstanding Cadet in Physical Fitness
26. Outstanding Track Competitor (Men and Women)
27. Wing Open Handball Champion
28. Wing Open Squash Racquet Champion
29. Special Athletic Award
30. Most Valuable Volleyball Player

#### GILLEN-SLEZAK TROPHY SYSTEM

(Varsity Athletics)

##### 1. Participation Points

Awarded to each cadet who remains on team for entire season	1
Earns a Varsity Letter	3
Earns a Junior Varsity Letter	2
Awarded to Fourth Classman who did not earn a letter but remained on team and was recommended for a freshman numeral	1

##### Achievement

Classmen selected to represent the AFA in national

competition; i.e., NCAA, NRA, etc.	1
Awarded for All-American recognition or receiving an NCAA Post Graduate Scholarship	2
Awarded to an individual or member of a team winning a National Championship	3

#### SQUADRON COMPETITION

##### Within Squadron

1. Brain of the Week: best grades for the week and/or most weekend study time.
2. Doolie of the Week: uniform, room, and knowledge grades.
3. Jock of the Week: intramural or intercollegiate performance.
4. Element of the Week: combined doolie scores on rooms, uniform, knowledge.
5. CQ of the Week: subjective judgment of CQ performance.
6. Practice Knowledge Bowls: freshmen compete against each other to learn knowledge.

##### Between Squadrons

1. Room grading
2. Marching to meals and parades
3. CQ grading/ORI inspections
4. Malanaphy/intramural competition
5. PFT scores
6. Knowledge Bowls

#### MISCELLANEOUS HONORS

1. Outstanding Cadet from the Protestant Cadet Religious Council	HC
2. Outstanding Protestant Cadet Choir Member	HC
3. Outstanding Catholic Cadet Choir Member	HC
4. Former Civil Air Patrol Cadet Graduating with highest class honors	Rocky Mtn Reg Cap

5. Outstanding Achievement in the Fourth Class Year
6. Outstanding Falcon Foundation Scholar
7. Former Regular Enlisted Cadet Graduating with highest class honors

Nat'l  
Liaison  
Officers

CCP

RRV

### APPENDIX III

#### SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON THE

#### COMPETITION AT USAFA

Is competition at the Air Force Academy a motivator?

- Does it encourage high performance?
- Does it teach cadets to work under stress?
- Do all cadets strive to win?
- Do they feel good when they win?
- Will they strive to win by unorthodox means?
- If they can't win positively in the system, will they strive to win distinction by other means - academic probation, tours, etc.,
- Is this behavior a negative characterization of effort because competition is "the only game in town?"
- Is the feedback continuous or occasional?
- High need achievers prefer moderate risks (50-50 chance of success). They avoid high risk tasks (which require luck to win) and low risk tasks (which are no challenge). How do cadets rate the various opportunities for competition?

If they don't perceive they can win, or if the situation is one of low risk, do they become/appear to become "woodworkers"?

- Does grading "on a curve" (GPA or MPA) produce a non-competitive atmosphere, that is, one in which the group will act to establish a norm of lower performance?

Does the competitive system at the Air Force Academy contribute to shaping behavior or to helping cadets prioritize their efforts by clearly linking behavior to the reward?

- Do Cadets know what is required to be Honor Squadron, or be on the Commandant's List, or to be Squadron of the Month?

- Can cadets translate vague institutional goals into individual goal setting actions?
- Does becoming a "teampayer" require those perhaps more mature or more able to face trials as an individual to lose some of their maturity/individuality?

Who wins?

- Is there only one winner and many "also rans?"
- What about the squadron which starts at No. 39 and ends up as No. 3?
- Are all non-winners defined as losers?
- Can those who meet the standard still fail? (GPA/MPA/grading on a curve)
- Which is most important - participation in everything or excellence in some things? (quantity or quality of participation?)
- Do we reward innovation, creativity, or the ability to give and take?
- Is it possible to be rated relatively low on MPA in respect to the entire cadet wing, but still hold a high leadership position in the squadron (i.e., Squadron Commander) because you are the "best in the squadron?" Does this foster striving for a lower standard than the person is capable of? Which is most important - "within wing" or "within squadron" standing?
- Are there "sub-honors" to be had or rewards for improvement over past performance?
- Are the forms of competitive activities at the Air Force Academy consistent with institutional objectives?

Do we pay lip service to team playing and reward individual effort?

- Who wears the Dean's star and Commandant's wreath - the individual or the squadron?
- Does working for the group hamper individual rewards?
- Do we stress "getting ahead of your peers"?
- Are those who participate in squadron activities better rewarded than those who participate less visibly in Academy-wide activities (football, choir, drum and bugle corps, etc.)?
- Does competition (especially the many forms here at USAFA) divide squadron units into cliques (those who are still competitive vs those who have given up or who have divergent interests)? Does the high number of possible competitive opportunities promote divergence?
- Does competition build trust within or between classes?
- Do upperclassmen mentor underclassmen? Do they feel a personal responsibility for the development of subordinates or are they concerned only for their own progression?
- Is there any other competition that is as important to a squadron's reputation as intramurals?

What is the effect of failure?

- When cadets, who have generally been successful in high school, compete with others of similar ability and learn that they cannot be successful in all areas, or fail, perhaps for the first time, what effect does this have on their self-esteem?
- When dealing with difficult personal problems of adjustment, etc., can cadets seek out other cadets for advice and support? Does the win/lose situation in which they are placed prevent this? Does admitting you are having difficulties equate with losing,



and result in others, from whom advice is sought, becoming winners?  
Must cadets deal with failure or loss of esteem totally alone, by themselves?

- Does competition serve to increase conflict between highly visible groups (sex and race) in a frustrating situation?
- Are "losers" identified and labeled as such early? Are they not allowed to shed this label even though they have changed the behavior originally used to classify them?
- If you lose early-on can you recover later?

What is the effect of competition on interpersonal skills of cadets?

- Is this the reason cadets are generally unable to empathize with others?
- Is this why they are less able to relate on an interpersonal basis than on a rank/status basis (greater emphasis on power than leadership)? Do we teach them that life is just roles and statuses, and that they need not learn other skills like how to develop an interpersonal relationship?
- Does competition muddy role expectations by creating a mission-vs-self (conflict of interest)?
- Can we teach compassion and humanistic skills without decreasing aggression?
- Do cadets help/support each other?
- Do they learn to:
  - a. Act like they don't care about winning.
  - b. Hint that they care about the plight of their classmates but not sincerely help (false commitment).
  - c. Not reveal or share information by playing dumb, i.e., "I'd

like to help, but I don't really know what's going on either."

d. Act like it's really not important if they win.

#### General

- What should we keep/discard?
- What is our purpose in training? What is the goal?
- Would a systems approach be helpful?
- Could we establish performance criterion for a standard to be met or must it primarily be "relative to peers?"
- Are graduates "team players" or "competitive individuals?"
- Do institutional role models (AOCs, faculty officers, etc.) teach winning at all costs (careerism, self-interest, etc.)?
- Can we produce people who want to do a good job and want to reach out and help others (task and people oriented)?
- Are the military and academic competition areas perceived differently; that is, is the academic arena viewed as a series of periodic contests which must be passed to stay in the game, and is the military arena seen as an on-going, ever present competition for reputation and relative status?

END

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